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AUTHOR Sepulveda, Betty R.
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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the factors within the environments of the classroom that contribute to intellectual retardation among the disadvantaged. To pinpoint the factors involved, educators must consider (1) the language barrier, (2) how it is formed, (3) at what level is it retarding the pupil, (4) What educational approaches are needed to meet the language needs of the deprived, and (5) how varied must the teaching approaches be, in order to involve the learner. A "transitional" type of readiness program is needed to help bridge the initial gap that exists when the disadvantaged child enters school. The term "disadvantaged" encompasses the non-English speaking Hispano, the non-standard-English speaking Hispano, the Negro, the poor-white, the Indian, and the Oriental. The point is not to replace the child's language, but to add other forms. Suggestions of how to motivate a disadvantaged child, and interest him in learning are as follows: (1) Give him problems to solve; (2) Provide manipulative materials to aid him in the solution; (3) Structure lessons simply; (4) Set short range goals that are meaningful and functional; (5) Allow large blocks of working time in physically oriented tasks; (6) Vary the teaching approach by making a game out of a lesson; and (7) Utilize the experiences that the child has developed in his poverty culture by beginning instruction at the time he enters school. (Author/LS)

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THE LANGUAGE BARRIER AND ITS EFFECT ON LEARNING

by Betty R. Sepulveda B.A., M.A.

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Many children of poverty groups enter our schools with little or no previous relevant language experience in the use of the formal English language - the language of the classroom. Therefore, the distinctive low achievements in school of the educationally deprived child are a continued extension of a reflection of selective retardation in his intellectual development. In considering how the learning needs of the disadvantaged differ from those of other children, when they enter school, and what implications these have for instruction, we find it necessary to examine the selective effects of retardation as they occur in the classroom and the extent to which these are preventive.

David P. Ausubel recently argued rather forcefully that neither the contribution of the cultural environment to the intellectual development nor the modifiability of the children's relative intellectual ability as measured by intelligence tests is seriously disputed any longer; that whatever the individual's genic potentialities are, cognitive development occurs largely in response to a variable range of stimulation. The more variable the environment to which individuals are exposed, the higher is the resulting level of effective stimulation.

The classroom is characterized by stimulating variable environments. What then are the factors within these environments that are contributing to intellectual retardation among the disadvantaged?

The LANGUAGE PROGRAMS FOR THE DISADVANTAGED states: ". . . that language is the greatest block to the realization of the deprived's full potential." Therefore, in order to pin-point the factors involved, educators must consider (1) the language barrier, (2) how it is formed, (3) at what level is it retarding the pupil, (4) what educational approaches are needed to meet the language needs of the deprived, and (5) how varied must the teaching approaches be, in order to involve the learner.

Initially our problem arises because our presently used curriculum does not provide for a much needed TRANSITIONAL type of readiness program to help bridge the initial gap that exists when the disadvantaged child enters school.

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The term "disadvantaged" encompasses, the non-English speaking Hispano, the nonstandard-English speaking Hispano, the Negro, the poor-white, the Indian, and the Oriental.

At present, the Spanish-speaking population of the Southwest is in every stage of acculturation, and consequently the language problems of the Hispano child are of two distinct types; according to William R. Holland's article, "Language Barrier as an Educational Problem of Spanish-Speaking Children."

(1) At one extreme, of the acculturation continuum, are the unacculturated, the MONOLINGUAL Spanish-speaking. They simply do not know English, they speak only Spanish. This child can function in the American schools if he is taught English as a second language or if he is placed in a bi-lingual classroom situation. However, Holland states that throughout the Southwest the Monolingual Hispano is a small minority.

(2) The middle-range of the acculturation continuum is occupied by the BI-CULTURAL group. They compose the greater number of intellectually retarded Hispano children that attend our schools. They bring to the educationally disadvantaged group a language problem that results from learning sub-standard usage of English; hence, their language problem merges with the language problem faced by other disadvantaged children of different ethnic backgrounds.

Contrary to common belief, the Hispano child HAS similar language problems to those of the Negro or the poor-white, since he brings to the classroom the English he learns from other disadvantaged children. This sub-standard system of communication develops as the Spanish-speaking child tries to learn English, but occupying the lower-socio-economic strata of society finds social interaction only with other members of the poverty group family. He learns their sub-standard English language patterns and is then bound more to the total disadvantaged group by the system of communication than he is to the monolingual Spanish-speaking segment.

The newly acquired system of communication then resembles the language of the Negro, if the Hispano learns it from the Negro, or it resembles the sub-standard English of the

illiterate poor-white if he learns it from the poor-white. Dr. John K. Sherk, Jr. substantiates this fact in his article, "Dialect-The Invisible Barrier to Progress in the Language Arts." He states ". . . most 'ghetto' children bring to school the language of the community into which they were born."

The report of the NCTE Task Force on Teaching English to the Disadvantaged asserts that according to scores in academic potential and reading readiness tests, the GAP between disadvantaged and middle-class children is at its smallest when both enter school. This gap, however, widens as the two groups progress in school when logically it should disappear.

This fact is interestingly indicative, especially since for years the schools have operated under the false assumption that lack of experiences in a restricted environment is responsible for poor achievement in the classroom. Furthermore, this fact signifies that the problem in educating the disadvantaged is that the schools have been unable to overcome the initial gap.

The NCTE report suggests that the schools are faced with two alternatives when combating intellectual retardation: (1) they can through extensive pre-school work, change the children before these enter school, however, the report also indicates that despite encouraging signs, the preschool programs are not geared to the type of program that will place disadvantaged children on an equal educational plane to that of the middle-class child; (2) the second alternative is to change the school to teach the children we have.

Detailed consideration will reveal that the first alternative by-passes the problem. The pre-school programs basically operate under the same assumption stated above; they only extend the same middle-class curriculum down to an earlier age, but do little to adapt the curriculum to the language needs of the disadvantaged.

The second alternative has interesting possibilities, however, it will be necessary to identify the level of the school where the change is indicated and the area of instruction that needs revision.

The Level at which the child becomes retarded

Ample research indicates the K-3 level as strategic for it is during this period of schooling that the highest percentage of disadvantaged become retarded.

(a) Benjamin S. Bloom, in Stability and Change in Human Characteristics, points out that general intelligence is fifty percent developed by age four, eighty percent developed by age eight. This stresses the importance of learning at the K-3 level.

(b) Frank Riessman states that reading inabilities are estimated at over 50 percent among educationally deprived children, while for other children these range from 15 to 20 percent.

Since the effects of intellectual retardation do not become as alarming at the K-3 level as they do thereafter, educators have here-to-fore not deemed this level of the school important enough to merit detailed scrutinization as to its contributions to the overall pupil retardation.

The instructional areas that need revision at the K-3 level are not easily detected since the problem is complicated by non-verbal failures, and by negative behavior on the part of the pupil. However, if the overt negative behavior is viewed as indicative of protest against meaningless instructional approaches that do not meet the child's needs, interests, and abilities, it becomes self-explanatory. What is happening is that a cycle is formed where the formal language used by the teacher, or the instructional approaches, or a combination promote retaliation. The end result is pupil retardation and teacher disappointment to say the least.

One of the most indicative of all behaviors is a display of short attention span. Short attention span is a learned by-product of the disadvantaged's overstimulated environment - too many things go on simultaneously - so the child learns to shut out stimuli that lacks meaning, or that threatens him in any way. When signs of this behavior emerge, the teacher can be certain that the lesson is too difficult, that communication is not taking place, or that the approach used is so foreign to the child that it alienates him completely.

The Area of Instruction that needs revision

In our society the middle-class child comes to school to learn to read. The disadvantaged child does not; he comes to school to learn the formal standard English language of the middle-class school in order to function in its middle-class setting. The LANGUAGE PROGRAMS FOR THE DISADVANTAGED asserts that the lack of educational approaches to provide for the deprived's language needs have contributed greatly to the present retardation crisis.

Educators, thus far, have failed to realize that learning standard formal English entails similar instructional approaches to those involved when learning a new language; and in so doing they overlook the importance related to the SEQUENCE of language significant in the process of acquiring functional usage in formal standard English. Consequently, teaching the disadvantaged READING, using formal English without first teaching him its usage we nourish the existent language barrier to the degree that it blocks progress first in the language arts and soon in all areas of learning. The barrier shuts out all participation on the part of the child, and he learns to exercise and perfect negativism to extreme dimensions while attending school. There is little communication between the teacher and the pupil unless he is taught formal standard language patterns, and given specific instruction in the LISTENING and SPEAKING stages of the sequence of language before attempting the READING and WRITING stages of the language.

Klausmeir and Dresden in their book, Teaching in the Elementary School, discuss the importance of the sequence of language. I submit that the gap that exists initially, widens because in addition to the already mentioned, teachers begin instruction at the reading level-the third stage in the developmental sequence of language. When teaching a language such as French, German or Spanish, one would not think of beginning to teach reading first. Why then is it expected that the disadvantaged function at this level without adequate preparation in the first two stages - listening and speaking areas.

The traditional readiness program incorporated in our presently stressed curriculum is not geared to the language needs of the disadvantaged. Definite instructional changes are needed to enhance their educational opportunities. These changes are comparatively few in number and relatively simple to implement when viewed from the preventive point of view as opposed to remediation in later grades. They prevent the alienation experiences that result from constant failures, the negative attitudes toward learning, the retaliative behavior that results because of boredom, the negative habits that our present methods foster and nourish, and above all the instructional changes will prevent the intellectual retardation that causes the child to resist learning throughout the succeeding grades as he slowly awaits the dropout status.

General Overview of an approach

What is needed is a revision of the reading readiness area of the primary curriculum to include approaches similar to those employed in the foreign language laboratories, wherein the emphasis is placed on the LISTENING and SPEAKING areas of language, and based on the LEARNING-BY-DOING educational philosophy which is the philosophy the deprived adheres to most in his style of learning.

The approach's primary purpose is to form a transitional bridge, so to speak, to help the disadvantaged child transcend from his culture to the middle-class culture of the school through the via of language. Developing listening and speaking familiarity with formal standard English language patterns should basically constitute the format of each lesson taught during the first 9-12 weeks of grade one, regardless of the content area of the subject covered.

The revision constitutes highly structured academic type lessons in both the LISTENING and SPEAKING stages of language - the first two phases of the sequence of language - to meet an adult oriented type of interest displayed by the disadvantaged first grader. The high structurization can be slowly relaxed as the child acquires security in the new strange environment of the school; however, it should be maintained as long as the child displays a need, as a security generating factor to help him become more and more functional in the classroom.

The revision also includes highly structured lessons in the first two phases of the sequence of language, motivated by:

1. The game format using short oral expressions to help the child learn formal standard language patterns quickly, but always involving direct action connected with the spoken expression.

   For example, when teaching the child how to fold an 8 x 11 sheet of newsprint into sixteen squares for a particular assignment; the teacher might suggest playing: "My turn, your turn". The child folds the newsprint as he repeats after the teacher:

   "Put the corners together and crease it."

   "Turn the paper."

   "Put the corners together and crease it,"

   until the paper is folded to the desired size. Through this simple, but necessary activity, the child focuses on a specific illustrated direction as the teacher emphasizes the spoken language pattern together with the desired action. Next she signals to the class saying "Your turn", as they, too, speak the oral expression and perform the task.

In this manner the child learns formal language patterns in a functional and meaningful setting. One important thing to keep in mind, however, is that the way a lesson is structured will always depend on the personality of both the teacher and the class.

Riessman explains that the game-format is appealing to the disadvantaged because most games are generally concerned with direct action, quick visible results which the deprived child expects from all involvments. The disadvantaged appreciates sharply defined, highly structured, clear-cut rules.

2. Secondly, the revision should be motivated by first-hand experiences in science, music, art, social studies, as well as the language arts, <u>but always using functional language expressions when introducing specific concepts</u>. Coordinating the teaching of formal language English patterns with these areas

of the curriculum assures challenging and varied content commensurate to the child's interests, abilities and needs. The outcome of this type of experience organization will:

-involve the child in the selecting, planning and participating stages of each experience,

-reveal diagnostic needs clearly,

-develop usable vocabulary rapidly,

-bind the class into a working unit, language-wise, and

-lessen the instructional range considerably.

Oral activities using poetry as the vehicle of usefullness is one of the best ways to teach English intonation patterns. Jingles and rhymes become the structured lesson, and the form of presentation reinforce it. When teaching a poem, the teacher serves as a model, the only requirement is to repeat by rote each phrase that the teacher says. The entire class participates in this activity at once. The rhymes provide repeated familiar repetitions that quickly fascinate children and cause them to respond favorably and become acutely aware of sound. At this stage of language learning, rhymes eliminate, on the part of the child, the need to translate speech in order to participate in oral class work, hence he becomes a participant the first day. His reports to parents are very favorable. He says: "We are learning to talk together, to play games with words."

As the poems or rhymes are learned by pupils in the class a new phase of participation emerges. The child that repeats the poem correctly, now becomes the model-"leader". Quickly this becomes a "round-robin" type of activity, as soon as the first child learns the poem assigned, he leads the class and then selects another to do so. How rapidly this happens will depend on:

-the simplicity of the selection,

-its seasonal application, or

-whether it reflects familiar experiences children wish to express.

From this point on it becomes a matter of learning new poems related to current events, setting up acceptable standards to encourage a constructive speech program, developing the sequence, the vocabulary, and the content of a poem, and developing academic oriented activity centers from the familiar poem material.

The third inclusion needed in the revision of the reading readiness area of the primary curriculum is specific lessons in LISTENING geared to the language needs of the disadvantaged.

At present few teachers, teach listening as a separate skill of the language arts cluster. Teachers have assumed that the child comes to school having developed listening skills in the home, and to a certain degree he has, but not to the degree that is needed when learning new language patterns in a foreign system of communication within a strange and new setting.

Dr. Ralph G. Nichols stresses the importance of listening in the article, "What Can Be Done about Listening," when he says;

(1) ". . . of the four language arts listening is quantitatively the most important because 45 percent of the time we spend in verbal communication is spent in listening."

(2) ". . . without training in listening most of us operate at precisely a 25 percent level of efficiency when listening to a ten minute presentation."

If this is the case among adults, who more fully realize the value of listening, at what level of efficiency does a primary child function without training and without realizing the importance of listening?

Ruth Strickland lists eight stages in listening development, and in relation to these she emphasizes:

(1) that children will be found in the elementary grades who represent each of the eight stages,

(2) that teachers need to ascertain their pupils respective stages of development in listening and provide planned experiences designed to promote growth in this skill, and

(3) that some authorities attribute the cause of reading disability, in many cases, to poor listening training.

Robert W. Kilbourn found this to be true also and touches on it briefly in his article, "LISTENING Comprehension: An Area for Teacher Experimentation". He states, linguistic scholars suggest that a language cannot be learned efficiently for purposes of reading and writing without the development of aural-oral language skills. This suggests increased emphasis in our schools on skills development through listening and speaking.

Both in the areas of SPEAKING and LISTENING the procedures will include two basic characteristics.

(1) Setting up acceptable standards which is the first step in a constructive speech program.

The standards will need to be set up by the children as they depict the needs of the class. This procedure induces a continued element of both group and self-evaluation necessary to continued improvement. To do this, make a tape of the speech contributions of each child as he leads the class in a simple rhyme; as a class listen to the tape. Record on a chart the improvements children dictate. Use these as simple standards and refer to them daily before and after "talking time", or "listening time".

Speaking	Listening
To be a good leader:	To listen:
1. use a big voice,	1. We sit tall.
2. wait for others to say each line after you,	2. We fold our hands.
3. know the poem or rhyme.	3. Our feet are still.

Getting the children to hear themselves as others hear them is a beginning to becoming speech conscious, and getting the children to assume a specific physical position when

listening is the beginning of teaching children the importance of the connection between listening and learning - the concept that good listening makes all learning easier.

Whenever a pupil does not adhere to the standards, teacher demonstrations will help. The teacher, again and again as the class requires, becomes the model stressing the standards of behavior on the class chart. Also quick evaluations, followed by sincere praise of having reached the "good leader's" goals will help.

Louise Abney and Grace Rowe offer good suggestions for evaluating how a child uses his voice when he speaks to a class.

(2) Finding fuctional uses for tne material learned in oral speaking activitie that will reinforce the listening development skills too. For example:

(a) Correlate with art - paint the idea in the poem, (that was taught previously).

(b) Make a "learning center" of each poem the class learns to speak, place the poem on a chart, duplicate the vocabulary of the poem on word-cards, and assign the child to match the two. Explain that the word cards are "out-of order" and the chart poem words are in order.

MERGE THE "TRANSITIONAL" TO THE "TRADITIONAL" CURRICULUM

At this point, transfer from the revised first grade curriculum to the regular middle-class curriculum begins to take place at a gradual pace inducing more formal academic activities geared to developing both reading readiness and beginning reading skills through the extensive use of (1) learning centers, (2) reading charts, and (3) phonetic analysis.

This approach is recommended for use with an entire class and strongly adheres to Dr. Ralph Scott's idea of keeping the class together as long as possible to get the effects of social learnings. That is, when teaching phonics, math, or reading delay grouping as such until basic controls are developed within the class and all feel secure in a group situation, but continue to individualize instruction through center activities to provide for individual needs.

Learning Centers:

Since the disadvantaged child attacks the majority of his problems by the trial-and-error method of discovery, and needs to become physically involved through the use of materials in order to conceptualize, the use of learning centers is recommended.

A learning center is simply a problem-solving assignment that is individualized, and motivated through the use of colorful manipulative materials that will aid the child in arriving at a successful solution.

Some of the outstanding outcomes of center activities are: (almost self-taught)

-visual discrimination,
-left to right sequence,
-individualized seatwork that replaces the lifeless "ditto sheet" or workbook busywork.
-self-selected tasks
-physical involvement through the use of manipulative materials,
-meaningful drill,
-they assure the child success in academic oriented tasks,
-they provide reachable and understandable goals for the child to to work toward,
-they help the child conceptualize and evaluate his progress, as well as correct his errors individually, and
-they serve to introduce SIGHT VOCABULARY in a realistic setting.

As each center is completed, and each short-range goal reached, learnings are reinforced and intrinsic motivation generated as the child experiences the joy of learning.

Reading Charts

Charts based upon class experience and prepared cooperatively by the teacher with the children provide the reading material during the beginning stages of reading instruction. The main purpose of a reading chart is to give children meaningful contacts with reading symbols. The children are not expected actually to read the charts, the function of a

chart is to give children experience in seeing their spoken words converted into printed symbols. However, through the use of reading charts, the child is introduced to the concepts of left to right sequence, letter formation, line-space concepts involved in the mechanics of writing as he orally repeats each letter name of the letter that is written after the teacher says it for him. The child is also introduced to the future pre-primer reading vocabulary in a contextual setting that is meaningful to him, since the vocabulary used in the reading charts is related to first-hand experiences reinforced by specific language patterns that have previously been made meaningful to him. The reading charts introduce and furnish a backlog of sight vocabulary which will prepare the child to be more successful when he meets this vocabulary again in the pre-primer reading. It is possible and highly advisable to introduce all the pre-primer vocabulary through the use of experience charts, making these into learning centers and letting the child match their content with individual word cards since the activity adds to the number of fixations and aides in vocabulary recognition to such a degree that when the child reads from a pre-primer he meets only with success and thus develops enjoyment from the reading phase of language. Both individual and group charts may be used in this manner, and related to any reading series.

Nila B. Smith gives helpful suggestions for composing, preparing, and giving children practice related to reading charts. She suggests a set of fundamental steps which are frequently used, and which, no doubt, will encourage each teacher to work out interesting ways of varying her own procedure as she becomes experienced in chart work.

Phonics:

Reading as a learning problem must be attacked first as one of word recognition when teaching the disadvantaged. The solution of teaching them to read lies in teaching them a systematic method of attacking and analyzing words. Any phonics program that is used, then, must reinforce the oral language activities through auditory, visual, and kinesthetic training. Children must be taught to listen for, and to recognize the sounds in familiar spoken words. They must be made aware of the fact that every word they speak is composed of sounds placed in a certain order.

Practically every method of reading instruction includes some phonics training, since phonics helps the child break through the mechanical barrier of word recognition, it should constitute the first type of group reading instruction the child should encounter. With a simple stock of the five short vowels and ten consonant sounds, the child can independently unlock many familiar words, but he must not be overwhelmed by both phonics and reading pre-primers at the same time. Teaching the child the short vowel sounds and the consonant sounds will reinforce, through use, his newly acquired listening and speaking skills in a functional manner. In addition, it will help him realize the degree of acuteness at which he is expected to function.

Furthermore, phonics helps the child associate the visual symbol with the sounds known to him in oral-aural form.

Learning the sounds of the short vowels and the consonants, and learning to write the letters is a sufficiently heavy academic load because it is filled with tedious detail; and hence, should be taught apart from reading.

Summary:

Educationally, this approach builds a bridge to help the child transcend from one culture to the other via a new acquired form of language without rejecting outright the first language of any child - be it a second language or a sub-standard form of English. As teachers we accept the view that we leave his language alone, our task is simply to teach standard language usage as though it were a foreign tongue. In so doing we exploit the tremendous psychological uplift implicit in the idea of acceptance by saying in effect: "I accept your language, use it when you need to communicate, but learn another form, too." The point is not to replace the child's language, but to add other forms. The teacher then strives to teach the concept that both kinds of language are useful, each at its appropriate time and place. This view helps the child to keep from feeling as an outcast either at home or in the classroom. The child, then, is not taught that his language is wrong, but is made aware of the many possible ways to use language. He learns which language usage is most effective for particular situations and is thus given the opportunity to make language work for him.

One of the overall goals the teacher should strive toward is to evoke intrinsic motivational participation. The question is often asked; How do you motivate a disadvantaged child, and how do you interest him in learning?

(1) Give him problems to solve,

(2) provide manipulative materials to aid him in the solution.

(3) Structure lessons simply, so he understands what is expected of him.

(4) Set short-range-goals that are meaningful and functional.

(5) Allow large blocks of working time in physically oriented tasks that are free from pressures.

(6) Vary the teaching approach by making a game out of a lesson, a learning center out of it, or a teacher helper situation where he explains to another child that needs help what the lesson is about, and

(7) Utilize the unique and usable experiences that the disadvantaged child has developed in his poverty culture by beginning instruction where the child is, at the time he enters school.

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